DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 294 SP 037 151

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TITLE	Elementary Teacher Preparation with Multicultural Requirements.
PUB DATE	97
NOTE	6p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Course Selection (Students); *Cultural Awareness; Cultural Pluralism; Curriculum Development; Educational Quality; Education Courses; Elementary Education; Ethnic Groups; Higher Education; *Multicultural Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; *Required Courses; *Teacher Education Curriculum

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the multicultural perspective of elementary teacher education programs nationally. There were three objectives: research the inclusion of multicultural education into elementary teacher preparation programs, identify institutions that incorporate multicultural education into general education coursework requirements, and identify institutions that incorporate multicultural education into professional teacher education coursework requirements. In the fall of 1994, data were collected from 42 institutions accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) with elementary education programs and a multicultural course requirement. Results showed that 19 institutions had multicultural education in the general education requirements, 5 institutions required a specific course in multicultural education, and 14 had a list of multicultural offerings from which a student was required to select a course. These were usually offered as history, geography, sociology, or anthropology. Of surveyed institutions with elementary teacher preparation programs, 24 had a multicultural education course in the professional teacher education requirements. Twenty of these institutions required a specific course, and four allowed options. It was concluded that when students can select courses, less standardization in learning and content is likely. Therefore, more specific guidelines are needed for optional multicultural courses that preservice teachers take in general education. When professional teacher education requires a designated course, the institution can assure that the students are provided with similar multicultural content. (JLS)

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Elementary Teacher Preparation with Multicultural Requirements

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ABSTRACT

Of the 42 surveyed institutions with elementary teacher preparation programs, approximately half of the multicultural requirements were in general education and half were in professional teacher education. When the institutions required multicultural education in the general education component of the program the student had options on which course would met the multicultural requirement. The majority of the institutions with a multicultural education requirement in the professional teacher education, had a specific course devoted to meeting the multicultural education requirement.

Elementary Teacher Preparation with Multicultural Requirements

What should teachers know and be able to do? The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1994) requires teachers to be proficient with "skills in effectively teaching students from racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds."

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher (NCATE 1991) specifically states that the curriculum for professional education programs should provide instruction in the understanding and application of culturally diverse populations. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS 1992) recommends that elementary teacher preparation programs should incorporate a multicultural perspective into the general education and professional teacher education requirements. The new curriculum standards for teaching social studies list culture as the first of ten teaching strands to be incorporated into the

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elementary school curriculum. (National Council for the Social Studies Education 1994)
There is a national debate over to what extent the university or college curricula should be changed to reflect ethnic, cultural and gender diversity (NCSS
1992).

If an elementary teacher preparation program intends on incorporating multicultural education then it should "help the students comprehend and attend to the cultures, heritage's, and experiences of ethnic groups in the United States" (Gay 1983).

The Curriculum Guidelines for Multicultural Education has linked the principles, concepts, and issues of cultural groups and ethnic groups to the variables of gender, social class, and regions when defining multicultural education. (NCSS 1992) For this study, multicultural education is the study of various racial, ethnic, gender, and class groups in the United States (Gay 1983; Stone 1991).

The purpose of this study was to assess the multicultural perspective of elementary teacher education programs nationally. There were three objectives for the study.

1. Research the inclusion of multicultural education in elementary teacher preparation programs.

2. Identify institutions which incorporate multicultural education into general education course work requirements.

3. Identify institutions which incorporate multicultural education into professional teacher education course work requirements.

Method
During the fall of 1994, data were collected on 42 NCATE-accredited preservice elementary education programs in colleges and universities that have a multicultural course requirement. The institutions were identified during a previous investigation "Social Studies in the Preparation of Elementary School Teachers". (Bennett 1993).

The multicultural courses were reviewed and relevant information for this study was recorded. The institution, the course title, reference number, and the course credit hours for each required course were obtained. The courses were labeled and categorized as a general education requirement or professional teacher education requirement.

For consistency, the credit hours for the courses are presented in semester hours. If the data indicated courses could be taken for a variable range of credit hours, the minimum number of credit hours required was recorded.

Results and Discussion. Of the 139 originally sampled institutions which offered elementary teacher programs there were 42 institutions which have a course that was identified as multicultural education. Approximately half of the multicultural requirements were in general education and half were in professional teacher education.

General Education. Of the 42 surveyed institutions with elementary teacher preparation programs, there were 19 institutions with a multicultural education in the general education requirements. Only five institutions required a specific course in multicultural education and 14 (74%) had a list of multicultural education courses that the student was required to select a course from. The average semester credit hours for the multicultural education requirements in general education was 3.19.

If the institution allowed the students to select a course to meet the multicultural requirement, the courses were usually offered as history, geography, sociology, or anthropology courses. Sometimes the institutions would indicate the course options should include world culture, American minorities, cultural diversity, cross-culture or gender diversity. Two of the 19 courses designed as multicultural courses students could select from, had a focus on a selected cultural group: "Black" culture and Puerto Rican.

There were five institutions which designated a specific course in general education to meet the multicultural requirement. Four of the five institutions had a specific course that was labeled as human diversity, multicultural/multigroup relations, ethnic and cultural minorities.
Dakota State College required a history course on Native Americans.

Professional Teacher Education. Of the 42 surveyed institutions with elementary teacher preparation programs, there were 24 institutions with a multicultural education course in the professional teacher education requirements. There were 20 institutions (83%) that required a specific course in multicultural education and 4 that had options. The average semester credit hours for these 24 courses was 2.54.

Over half of the courses were titled: Multicultural Education. In a few cases the focus was on a specific ethnic group, gender, or region. Two courses were listed with teaching as the focus in the title.

Conclusions.
When the institutions required multicultural education in the

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general education component of the program the student had options on which course would met the requirement. Therefore, students from the one institution could be learning different multicultural content and a student form the institution may not take course which provides him/her with a well developed foundation in multiculturalism. The content of a single course in general education will not prepare students with the skills to teach children from diverse backgrounds. There needs to be more specific guidelines for which optional multicultural courses preservice teachers take in general education.

In the professional teacher education component of the program, there was usually a designated multicultural course. Since all students are required to take the course the institution can be assure that the students are being provided with similar multicultural content. The instructor of a multicultural course could design a content and instruction of the course to meet the needs of teachers and the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the children they will teach. One course in multicultural education is one way teachers can be trained to meet the diverse needs of children in America's schools. It would be optimal if field experience in diverse setting was provided in conjunction with the multicultural course.

Further study needs to be done to investigate how institutions can provide knowledge in multicultural education and students with skills to work in a multicultural setting. Research on the content of the multicultural courses in professional teacher education of several institutions could provide insights into unique techniques on how to prepare students to teach in a diverse society. An investigation of course syllabi can determine if the focus of the course is on knowledge about cultural groups, skills to teach in culturally diverse setting, and/or resources for meeting the unique needs of the student. Models need to be designed that develop a relationship between the knowledge gained in course work and the application of that knowledge in the field.

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